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ILLUSTRATIONS OF ITALIAN PROVERBS.

PROVERBS are the expression of ideas which strike a whole people as undeniable truths, and either for their point, or tact, or universal applicability, become "familiar in their mouths as household words." It is not the least curious circumstance in connexion with proverbial philosophy, that there is scarcely one "old saying" in any nation which is not known to most others under a different form, the change being made to suit some peculiarity in manners, customs, or even the productions of the country. The English point to "carrying coals to Newcastle" as extreme of useless labour; the Jews placed it in the conveyance of "oil to a city of palms." "A constant drop wears a stone," turns up in France in the guise of "A force de forger, on devient un forgeron,"—by dint of forging one becomes a blacksmith. We might fill a volume with instances such as these. The Italians are remarkable for throwing their proverbs into personified forms, if we may so speak, which of course renders the idea the fitter for illustration. We have selected a few of them for that purpose, which do not bear so deep a stamp of nationality about them as render them uninteresting or unintelligible to the American reader. Few of the people of modern Europe have so large a collection as the Italians, as a long and almost uninterrupted flow of civilisation, and eminence in the arts and literature, have enabled them to lay up a more than ordinary store of popular wisdom, the common sense of every-day life. Pity it does not produce better fruit in their acts.

It is rather singular that "wise saws" are nearly always most numerous amongst people who do least. Shortcomings in acting are made up for by a multiplicity of sage apophthegms. Few men ever uttered so many, containing so much sound truth and wisdom, as Lord Bacon, and probably few men ever failed so deplorably in carrying out the simplest and plainest axiom of morality. Proverbs are plentiful amongst most lazy, unenergetic nations; and we suppose the want of consistency in their character may be ascribed to the same human weakness which caused the fall of the great philosopher. We cannot conclude without stating that the proverbial sayings of most countries fall far short of embodying



1. *Io niente faccio, ed il cervel mi becco.*

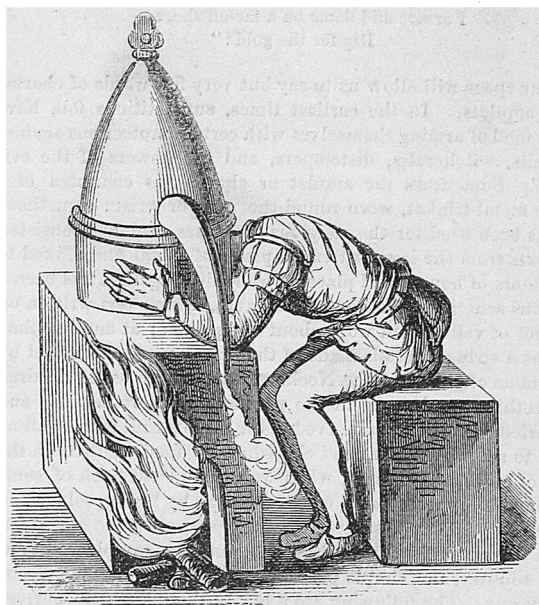
I am doing nothing, and devouring my brain.

the highest principles of Christian morality. A vein of coarse, worldly selfishness runs through most of them, not excepting those of that far-famed individual, "Poor Richard," so that, if acted upon, they might make a man wealthy and "respectable," but not always noble or disinterested.



2. *Che porta dietro il torchio ha par costume,
A se far ombra, ed a chi 'l segue lume.*

He who carries the torch behind him gives himself the shade, and to him who follows, the light.



3. *Mi lambico il cervello tutto lieto.*

I puzzle my brain with a great deal of pleasure.